

Letter from Taizé

Living the Council of Youth

May 1975

From South America, I saw the Council of Youth as a slight breeze bearing along a few seeds of communion. A breeze carries, without being visible in itself. The Council of Youth, being a breath of communion, is not visible as something distinct.

It would not be very hard to create a new movement, gathering people all somehow alike, or having the same kind of option. It is much more arduous to live in a "state of council" — with its constant striving after communion between people across the entire globe who are quite unlike one another, but all trying to live Christ for others.

Communion between people is always something strong but fragile.

Our communion is strong, when the bonds woven between us all by the Council of Youth can really be seen and touched. Because what matters

is to live this communion, and not slip back into the petty quarrels which divide Christians, be they around old issues or new ones. Perhaps without realizing it, the Council of Youth is then weaving a portion of the cloak of Christ, that cloak which is the Church, using many and varied threads. Some threads are bright and joyful, others are dark with human blood.

Any communion is also something fragile. In the Council of Youth this is bound to be so, since we have no intention of acquiring followers, we have no system to defend, or a cause which must triumph.

Christ himself was a man without defence. Christ does not ask us to defend ourselves, but to abandon ourselves.

So communion, strong and fragile, is perhaps the seed which the Council of Youth is charged to spread across the world ? Perhaps that is part of its worldwide, ecumenical vocation ?

Roger, your brother

SINCE THE OPENING OF THE COUNCIL OF YOUTH . . .

For the opening of the Council of Youth tens of thousands of people were at Taizé. They had names : Manuel from Brazil, or Bruno from India, Ndaywel from Zaire, Sandra from Australia, or Monika from Germany. During the entire opening we were together, and then we went away again.

What common bond can there be between us ? Nothing unites us. Yet during three days we lived together, and now we know that we are not on our own. That, together with people all over the world, we are seeking to "become a 'universal community of sharing', become a people of the Beatitudes, in anticipation of what will be, in every place." Manuel has returned to his farm in Brazil where he continues to be part of the peasants' struggle. Bruno is organizing fishing cooperatives in India, Ndaywel is teaching in a university in Zaire, Sandra is working with her fellow-aborigines in Australia and Monika is studying medicine in Germany.

Like an enormous mirror, the Council of Youth stimulates each of us to use our freedom, our creativity, enabling us together to live beyond every hope and to follow the unknown paths of our liberation.

The paths are as yet unknown, but one thing is familiar from the years of preparation for the Council of Youth : it is not an individual liberation, the future belongs to all together. It is only the entire people of God, the whole Church together, which is capable of "kindling fire on the earth" and so becoming a people of the Beatitudes, a community of sharing.

So long as even one person in the world is hungry, "one question of Christ grips us : when the poorest of all were hungry, did you recognize me in them ? Where were you while I shared the life of those most deprived ?" This will remain the deep sense of our commitments, whether they be set in the context of struggles against certain of the present political and social systems of our various countries, or of a hidden life of prayer or a refusal of all the privileges of money and power. On the level of collective action, the ways of liberation chosen by farmers in India are certainly going to be very different from those of teachers in Africa or workers in Europe. But we feel how much all these varied ways lead towards the only reality — about which we know nothing except that it has already been anticipated for all by one man's passing from the nothing of death to the fulness of life. The One whose resurrection we celebrate.

Like a great mirror, the Council of Youth, in celebration after celebration, shows us what we have become and opens new ways before us. Each celebration deepens our communion with the whole people of God. Since the opening at Taizé there have already been a number of other celebrations. Accounts of them are gathered together in the following pages.

Many of us, in quest of a happiness offered by the Beatitudes, are coming to situations of difficult struggles and heart-rending analysis. "If we are involved in this, we know that we cannot demand anything exacting of others unless we ourselves stake everything." And our involvement is in the spirit of the Beatitudes, with those poor and oppressed, those who are voice-less.

The faces are different, according to the countries and the continents ; but they are everywhere, those who are poor, oppressed, voice-less. In rich lands there are misfits, immigrants from other countries, workers. But also, perhaps, there are mainly people who are treated as things,

manipulated at every step, even in the most intimate zones of life, by nameless powers. Such people are left rootless, given over to themselves and their artificial needs, walled in by prosperity. They have no place and no people to call their own. So are we, in the course of the Council of Youth, going to discover ways of shattering what keeps us apart? And of uniting all in one People of God, having a history and a direction, involved in an exodus towards the promised land? Will we be able to bring the spirit of the Beatitudes into existence among this liberated people?

Our struggling may be situated in prayer and contemplation, or within Church institutions, or on an international level, or elsewhere... But in each case, our concern will be to seek with all, young and adult, old people and children. There will be short periods when we shall meet together, at Taizé or elsewhere; otherwise, we shall be spread out through the entire world. But always we shall sense that "we are not alone, and that struggle and contemplation have a single source: Christ who is love."

Moiz

COUNCIL CELEBRATION IN MEXICO (Guadalajara, December 28-31, 1974)

"Through the Council of Youth celebrations in Latin America we have made explicit and celebrated the already-existing reality of a Church alive in the midst of the people.

The celebration in Mexico took place in Guadalajara, in the "Colonia Santa Cecilia", an outlying section of 30,000 inhabitants. Most are masons or manual laborers, they come from the countryside and are illiterate, they

suffer from poverty and poor sanitary conditions. Little by little communities of neighbors grew up, of men, of women, of couples, and of young people; they meet together once a week to reflect on the problems of their daily life, and to look at them in the light of the Gospel. Today in the district there are about fifty such communities of adults, which made it possible for them to host the Council celebration, just as a year ago they were able to welcome a preparatory meeting.

December was a month of intensive preparation, supported by three times of prayer each day together with the residents of the Colonia. On December 28, everyone arrived. The streets were full of young people carrying their gear, looking for the house where they would stay. For them, the fact of living with these extremely poor families was a participation in the reality and the hope of a Church in the process of being reborn among the very poor. And likewise, the presence of these young people aided the families to open themselves up to the universal dimensions of the people of God.

There were five prayer-celebrations, all involving presentations by young people. The themes were : Church, place of union for all — suffering of peoples — people on the move — people of hope — bearers of a liberating festival.

The celebration centered on the suffering of peoples was particularly striking : through the description of various personal situations the reality of our lands — Northern and Southern — was brought to life, victims of a system leaving exploitation, oppression, and dependence in its wake. A moment of silence expressed communion with all those who suffer : blacks, workers, women, students, peasants, Mexican-Americans, peoples with a long history of repression.

After the denunciations came the proclamation of the risen Christ, the victory of life, of love, of justice. Sunday,

a procession with lighted candles took place. We were like a people on the move. And there was a prayer vigil during the entire night. And also at times, different people from Santa Cecilia spoke of the activities of their groups, and how they were able to transform and bring together the Colonia.

In addition to the residents of the Colonia, the celebration brought together 1,500 young people from almost all the regions of Mexico and from fifteen other countries, notably Central-Americans as well as people from Canada, the United States, France, and Spain."

COUNCIL CELEBRATION IN ARGENTINA (Goya, January 3-6, 1975)

"Goya is a small town in a poor region of Argentina. The peasants there are among the most oppressed, deprived of their most basic human rights. There too the Church, viewing its mission as one concerned with the whole person, is a sign of hope through its involvement with them.

Beginning in early December several young people from other regions of Argentina and from Brazil began arriving at Goya, so that the celebration could really be lived with the inhabitants of this region. They wanted simply to share in the local situation. What made the celebration possible was the warm welcome offered by the people and the Church of Goya. Especially noteworthy in this respect was the presence of the bishop, Msgr. Devoto, which testified to his involvement with the very poor.

The central focus of the celebration was the question : how can we live Easter in our individual situations and in the situation of our people as a whole ? We reflected on

signs of death and resurrection. In the morning, this reality of death and hope in its personal aspects was the subject of the group discussions. In the afternoon, we expressed through music, theater, and dance the signs of death and resurrection discovered on a political and communal level, in different regions of the country.

Among the most powerful signs of death was the suffering of our brothers and sisters from Uruguay and Paraguay who live in exile in Buenos Aires. One of the most touching signs of hope was the ordination of Diego, a young deacon committed alongside the peasants. We were also struck to see how a Christian community in the interior of our country is bearing up under the difficult situation of having one of its members in prison.

A very important part of the celebration was provided by the presence of several members of the central committee of the Agrarian Leagues of Corrientes. They described the harsh situation of the peasants of that region, a situation of oppression and death, and they explained the work of organizing which they do through the Leagues, an experience of hope and struggle so that all can be more and more conscious of themselves as active participants in their own history.

The final gesture of the Council celebration was a sharing in the piety of the people of Goya, through a pilgrimage together with them to the chapel of the Virgin of Itati. It was the reality of a people on the march, living the Easter passage in their daily lives.

The celebration gathered together more than 500 young people from Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay, workers, students and peasants, and in addition the people of Goya, who took part in certain activities of the celebration."

"The Council celebration in Brazil was held in Vitoria, a diocese which has opted for a type of pastoral activity centered on liberation, beginning on the grass-roots level. The diocese encourages the growth of small grass-roots communities, in the interior as well as on the outskirts of the city. Campo Grande and Itaciba are outlying regions where some 25 such communities are taking shape. Some live without water, electricity, or proper drainage. The members of the communities meet together regularly in one of the houses, a shack made of wood, in order to pray, discuss their problems, and get to know one another.

This was the site of the Council celebration, which brought together 1,200 persons from all the States of Brazil and some people from Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay. All of the reflection and activity centered around the notion of a Church of and for the people, a Church committed to human liberation in all its dimensions.

In order that the celebration might be an expression of concrete and vital experiences, young people from throughout the country who were already involved in the struggle of the common people were invited to come a month in advance. With young people from Vitoria and the grass-roots communities they took charge of the period of thorough preparation. In this way they were better able to become aware of the struggles and achievements of the people, so that not ideas but an ongoing life could be celebrated.

The participants in the celebration were welcomed into the homes of the residents of the neighborhood and were thus able to share in their lives. The welcome was so warm that the families who had no one to take in felt cheated!

The week before, several prayer vigils had been organized in the main churches of the neighborhood by the residents themselves. During the celebration, an

"assembly of the people of God" of Vitoria brought together 10,000 young people and adults in a stadium together with the archbishop and the auxiliary bishop. All those participating in the meeting entered the stadium in a long procession, symbolizing that as individuals and as the Church we are constantly moving ahead. That day, the entire people of God of the region had come together to celebrate their Church, in which many lay people exercise ministries and bear the responsibility for its growth and life. And the Council celebration was chosen to be the moment when the Church solemnly recognized the ministries of 200 lay-people within the small communities — *'catechetical teams', 'conscientization teams', 'human advancement', 'animators of Bible-study circles', etc.*"

COUNCIL CELEBRATION IN THE UNITED STATES (Philadelphia, March 8-16, 1975)

"Philadelphia : a large, prosperous American city. As everywhere in this nation of immigrants, the Churches clearly mirror the racial, ethnic and economic segmentation of the American people. Many are closed in on themselves, their buildings double-locked for fear of being robbed.

At the heart of the city lies the ghetto — mile after mile of dilapidated houses, trash-filled streets, vast areas of demolished buildings reminding one of a bombarded city. Few outsiders willingly enter the ghetto. Few of the black Americans and other minority groups imprisoned there even know another part of the city. Victims of a rich society, their lives are ruled by fear, violence, and mistrust.

A situation humanly without solution. A people with no visible hope for advancement. What is there to celebrate here that brought together people coming from 15 countries including Europe, Canada, Indonesia, and Africa ? Apparently nothing. Simply the existence in the

ghetto of a small local church, open to all. A church one can enter at any time. "Neutral territory" for rival gangs ; an oasis of welcome in a world of fear. An openness wide enough to include even a small group of us, white Americans and Europeans, living in the ghetto. In the course of three years of patient waiting, we saw barriers of incomprehension and suspicion fall one after another, and simple, unexpected lines of communication grow. And as this relationship deepened it widened to encompass the universal dimensions of the people of God. The ghetto opened to the world.

The Council of Youth celebration was quite simply a week when the life and worship of this local church opened to others. And with that the astonishing discovery — mutually recognized — that here where all seemed lost the promise of the Beatitudes is being fulfilled. For those with eyes to see this handful of Christians provides us with a vision of the springtime of the Church, a Church whose only security lies in Christ."

After beginning in this local church, the Council celebration involved a week of reciprocal visits by those who took part. In this way the celebration spread out to touch a Spanish-speaking neighborhood in a New Jersey town, a "ghetto" of abandoned old people in Manhattan, an interracial housing cooperative, a small-town church group, a center for work with drug addicts, and so on. Finally, everyone came together for a weekend to share their experiences and celebrate with the members of a blue-collar parish in Hicksville, New York.

EASTER COUNCIL CELEBRATION AT TAIZÉ

It is as Moiz said : *"This year, Easter Day did not mark the start of a new stage in the Council of Youth. The 'Letter to the People of God' and 'Living beyond every Hope' continue to be the basic elements upholding our*

commitments. These days of celebration here at Taizé find their place among the succession of celebrations of the Council of Youth in South America, North America, then later on in Africa and Asia. The Council of Youth is now like an ever-widening river. Afterwards, we will recapitulate everything once more."

For Holy Week and Easter, 18,000 people were at Taizé, 3,000 of them from Spain. Joseph, from Zaire (Africa) underlined the deep sense of such a gathering : "On our own, we cannot do very much. But by the Council of Youth we discover that the Church is a People. A People on the move. A People able to offer signs of hope — often very hidden, but already alive."

It was very bad weather, and there were few places where people could sleep away from the cold and damp. It is going to demand imagination, if we are to arrange a few simple shelters that could be heated without too much difficulty ; then next winter's meetings can be more well coming !

This *Letter from Taizé* is the summary of what was said on the evening of Easter Day : what Brother Roger expressed (p. 1-2) ; how Moiz characterised the period between the Opening of the Council of Youth and Easter (p. 3-5) ; reports of the celebrations at Guadalajara, Goya, Vitoria and Philadelphia, which were read by Angelina, Heloisa and Sue (p. 5-11) ; and what Joseph announced the coming celebrations of the Council, the new forms of meetings at Taizé, and the day celebrating the People of God to happen at Taizé on August 17 (p. 12-16).

THE COMING YOUTH MEETINGS AT TAIZÉ

From early July until October, each week, those coming for the youth meetings will have three possible choices. The week can be lived :

alone, in silence.

together with others, in "*districts*" of various kinds :

- districts of sharing, with many possible theme-groups.
- districts of expression through singing, music, mime, drawing.
- districts for work and helping to welcome.
- districts of silence.

or in "*research-units*", demanding that each participant undertake to be present the entire week, in which the work will center on a small number of precise questions. Two such units are anticipated :

— Many ask : what are the bases of belief ? Who is God ? Disbelief or faith in the resurrection ? So that around these questions there will be a "research-unit" on the faith of the People of God, the faith of the People of the Beatitudes.

— Many young people, already working, or students about to start work, are concerned : how to live according to the Beatitudes in working life ? How to say 'No' to compromises ? How to be really part of a People of God praying and struggling with those exploited ? This will be the second "unit".

Dates : Every week, from June 30, Monday through Sunday. Until June 30, weeks of work will prepare the summer meetings.

Age : 18 years minimum ; a meeting for those 15-17 will be held June 28-29.

Accommodation : Under your tents, or in dormitory tents. Bring sleeping-bag, air-mattress, blankets. Bring own tents if possible.

Costs : The Council of Youth has to pay for itself, without outside support. The same sum of money does not mean the same in a rich country as in a poorer one, so all contribute as they are able. (Basic cost at least 11-15 Francs per day, including meals).

Registration-form : p. 15.

On the evening of Easter Day, Joseph concluded : "At the Opening of the Council of Youth, we said how we must not simply continue as young people together, but with everybody, with no segregation. And this means that in the search how to live at the heart of the whole People of God, many of you have been seeking to pray, share and work together with people around you, be they parents, neighbors, friends, young and not-so-young, old people and children.

One of the next gatherings of the Council of Youth will be an attempt to bring together all those people with whom you are seeking a communion in your daily life, be they young or not. As a kind of parable to help us advance, there will be a Council Celebration at Taizé open to everybody. It will be centered on Sunday August 17. It will celebrate the whole People of God."

This day will be a first attempt to open towards other people, by being able to invite them to come to Taizé with us : people not our age, from other backgrounds, with other work, and other activities. And it is an attempt to open towards the full sense of the People of God : is communion possible between people who think and act in different, even opposing, ways ?

Date : The main moments will be on Sunday August 17, between 10 am and 6 pm. But if the journey is long, you can arrive on Friday August 15 and stay until the Monday, so as to be able to follow the common prayer at Taizé more

Accommodation : Those who are still of an age to camp, or "caravan", please do so. Otherwise, we shall find room with the people of near-by villages. Please fill-in the Registration-form on page 15 carefully !

Costs : Simple meals will be distributed. Each person will pay as they can and depending on the length of their stay, how they are lodged. More can be said by direct correspondence.

Name :

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First Name :

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Address :

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(with zip-code and country)

Profession : Age :

will come for August 17 — People of God Day

arriving leaving

with own tent/caravan : yes-no — can sleep in dormitory : yes-no

prefers village-room : yes-no.

Will take part in the week from Monday to Sunday

Has already taken part in a meeting at Taizé :

Yes-No

Is bringing own tent :

Yes-No.

Can be part of reflexion-groups in italian — german — french — english —
spanish — portuguese — dutch — swedish.

Can undertake simultaneous translation from into

Need more registration forms / Information material.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO WRITE ANNOUNCING YOUR ARRIVAL!
THEN THE WORK OF WELCOMING AND FEEDING YOU IS EASIER.

Letter n° 22

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— The next Council of Youth Celebrations will be held May 2-4, in Alabama (USA), in a poor rural community of blacks; and at the same moment, also in the US, in California among the Mexican immigrant-workers. Then, May 30 to June 1, in Quebec, at a pilgrimage-spot beside a small town where a quarter of the workers speak French and three quarters English.

— In Africa, several meetings took place at Easter, in Rutovu (Burundi), Brazzaville (Congo), Yaoundé (Cameroons). These are not so far Council celebrations, but preparatory meetings. In Yaoundé *"We lived three days that we never had dared hope for. Great variety of people : those at work (gardeners, workers, accountants . . .), others out of a job, students, foreign assistants . . . The main stress was put on the search for liberation in all our difficulties, the problem of "what will others say?" ; the dream, often quite impossible of 'making it', come what may ; the tension between two civilisations. We tried to see more clearly in the conflicts we have with other people, within ourselves, and in relationship to God. Then, on the Saturday evening, we celebrated the Paschal Vigil with drums, xylophones, dancing . . ."*

— In Asia and Oceania, numerous visits are at present being made, often with people from one Asian country going to another. Meetings have been held in Indonesia and Kerala (India). Other preparatory meetings will be taking place later in the Philippines, Thailand and New Caledonia.

— A young priest from Dahomey (Africa), Alphonse Quenum, and six other compatriots, were recently condemned to death for political reasons. At Easter Brother Roger sent the following telegram to the President of the Republic of Dahomey : *"With thousands young adults many countries gathered in Taizé learn seven death sentences including Father Quenum. In the name of human dignity, spare them. Do not wound the conscience of the young."*

— New publications :

A record of the music of the Opening of the Council of Youth at Taizé.

A new number of COMMUNION, *"The pearl of great price"*, with texts for young people on the ways they discover the essential : *"In the midst of the People of God, at the heart of our struggles, we are in search of the face of Him who loved us first."*

A book *"TAIZÉ — LE CONCILE DES JEUNES — POURQUOI ?"*, about the Council of Youth, is already available in French. It will be published later this year in English by SPCK (London).

Full details of all these can be had from Taizé.